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A Vision of Education for the San Francisco Schools



INTRODUCTION

"A Vision of Education for the San Francisco Schools" grew out of a four-day institute for San Francisco teachers, principals, parents, and counselors held in April and May, 1991. Sponsored by the San Francisco Unified School District and Superintendent Cortines, and by the San Francisco Education Fund, a nonprofit community agency dedicated to supporting public schools, the Institute was part of a national effort led by IMPACT II - The Teachers Network. IMPACT II, a nonprofit networking organization that recognizes and rewards innovative teachers, was the first organization in the country to place teachers at the center of educational reform, acknowledging them as professionals capable of designing and implementing successful programs that reach and motivate children.

The 60 San Francisco participants from 19 schools brought diverse experiences, backgrounds and perspectives to the group. Together, they forged a vision of what education can be in the San Francisco public schools. Their vision statement serves as a living document, laden with the promise of change and growth. They hope that their vision will inspire and challenge you to create your own and that it will foster dialogue among all individuals who care about the education of our children in San Francisco.

A Vision of Education for the San Francisco Schools

Sponsored by:

**The San Francisco Education Fund
The San Francisco Unified School District**

With Grateful Acknowledgement to:

Superintendent Ramon Cortines,
for his unqualified support

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The views expressed herein are those of the Institute participants
and do not necessarily represent those of our corporate sponsors.

PREAMBLE

We, who have the particular profession and area of responsibility that is public education, believe that a society's values, priorities, and future are all reflected in the state and condition of public education.

As educators, we strive to enrich, ennable, and unleash the creative energies of students. We understand that education is a lifelong process which is inherently valuable and which seeks to uncover meaning and beauty while celebrating the diversity and variety of the human spirit and experience.

The context where learning occurs profoundly influences the learning process. Consequently, the structure and governance of the educational system must reflect and embody democratic principles. Educators, including teachers, are integrally involved on all levels in the policy making and administrative decisions affecting the design, funding and delivery of educational services.

The future presents the global community with both incredible opportunities and tremendous difficulties. Education prepares students to act effectively and compassionately with the challenges they face. Education should enable students to become world citizens and to value world peace, freedom, human rights, and democratic principles. Our educational system should also provide students with opportunities to gain an understanding of and appreciation for the cultural, ethnic, sexual, and racial diversity of our society. Because all forms of life on earth are interconnected, and because our actions have local and global consequences, we respect, nurture, and protect our precious planet through educating ourselves and our students about the nature of our earth's complexity and the consequences of our physical and social deeds.

In recognition of the power and value of education, we propose initiating a constitutional amendment which guarantees that education be free, public, equitable, lifelong, individually and locally determined, fully funded and considered to be among the highest priority of government responsibility and purpose. We also ask that you explore, discuss and participate in our vision of the future of education in the San Francisco schools.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In our vision for the schools, the learning environment is learner-centered. The needs of the students of San Francisco determine the physical site, the philosophy of the curriculum and its delivery system and program design.

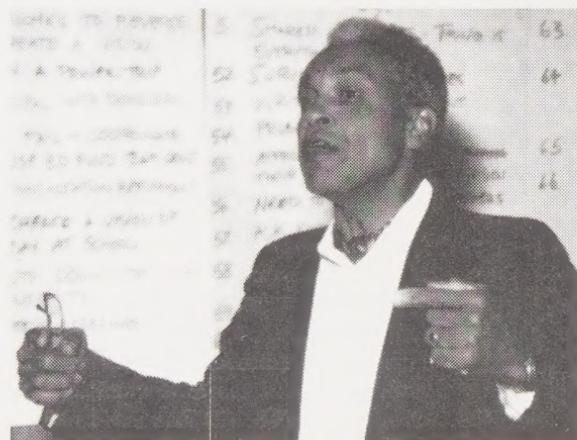
Students acquire and develop skills to their full potential in a clean, safe environment that provides adequate space for a variety of activities. These activities include not only instruction and learning, but

also the delivery of health and social services for the well-being of the whole person.

The environment includes well-equipped labs, computer rooms, libraries with quiet areas for reading, performing arts areas, student art exhibition space, recreation areas, eating areas, garden space, and an area for staff/student interactions and staff parking -- all of which are equitable throughout the district.

The learning environment is not site-contained or facility-bound, but extends beyond the school site to include the neighborhood, the city, the surrounding communities--the **WORLD**.

The curriculum is developmentally appropriate for all learners. It enables the individual to become a more active decision maker and a critical thinker in a lifelong learning process. Each student is offered a



variety of process-oriented, active learning experiences based on real life interests. These activities incorporate learning from all subject areas and are built upon the foundation of rich, engaging and appropriate preschool and early childhood education experiences available to all students.

In order to serve the needs of students who enter an ever-changing job market, our schools offer elective vocational programs that enable students to acquire skills which will equip them to meet the challenges of our industrial world. Throughout their educational experiences, students have personal time, space, and materials to pursue their own avocations, interests and creations, and all students have a forum, often outside of the school, for sharing their knowledge.

Two necessary components of program design are organization and time. In our vision, the organization of the learning environment is non-graded. There are opportunities to develop schools within schools in order to create learning centers of varying size. Decisions within the learning environment are based upon site consensus. The ability to schedule activities and time flexibly, both the length of the school day and the year and how it is divided, is the prerequisite for meeting student needs. Time is available for teachers to communicate with each other and

with students as a means of sharing ideas and information and fostering professional development.

THE STUDENT

In our vision the student has the right to have the seven dimensions of personality considered when developing curriculum. These dimensions are mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, sexual, aesthetic and cultural. We also believe that each learner should be seen as an undiscovered genius and that it is up to all members of the school community to nurture these students' hidden talents. Learners are seen as decision makers and participate in planning their education and course work. Learners have the chance to explore many subject areas and have a wide variety of materials, experiences and opportunities available to them. Besides academic learning, all students receive training in skills to function successfully in the world of work. Risk-taking is also an integral part of the learning and growth experience.

The student and family, in conjunction with the teacher, have the right to determine the time schedule for the student both within the school day and the school year. Learning may take more time for one student than another, and students may stay in school until completion of educational goals.

Through education, students develop high self-esteem and the confidence to make effective real life decisions. Learners are empowered, productive and fulfilled. They have respect for themselves and others because of their public school experience.

THE TEACHER

We envision the teacher as a leader who facilitates a learning environment that empowers members of the total school community to be active lifelong learners.

The teacher's role is fluid as an encourager in the development of the whole person, a supporter of self-esteem, a stimulator of a sense of fun and adventure as well as of ideas. A teacher creates opportunities for learning which inspire learners to go beyond their limits. The teacher has a strong awareness of belonging to the global community and encourages her/his students to be world citizens. Teachers reflect the diversity of the community in which they serve.

Teachers are leaders who have a voice in and control over their special craft which is teaching. Working as a facilitator with parents, students, and community members, they use expertise in how students learn to develop relevant curricula. Teachers' contributions are valued and recognized as they participate in the formation of policies that govern the school community.

As risk takers, teachers support each other. They validate their evolution as professionals. A commitment to excellence is not only reflected in an individual's participation in professional growth activities but also in a willingness to work with colleagues as mentors and coaches. By providing guidance and support for each other, teachers assure that high quality teaching is taking place.

Throughout a teacher's career, opportunities are available for personal and professional growth. Sabbaticals of varying lengths serve as a means for renewal, revitalization, and inspiration. Teachers are provided time to attend classes and seminars so that they may remain abreast of educational research and curricular innovation. Teachers also receive time for meeting on a regular basis so that they may share teaching strategies and information, solve problems, and serve as a means of support for their colleagues.

Salaries appropriately compensate teachers for the high degree of commitment, professionalism and responsibility inherent in their job. Exemplary teaching is also recognized through a range of monetary and other awards. These incentives are structured to reward all teachers who take on additional responsibilities or demonstrate excellence in teaching.

THE SITE LEADER

In our vision, the site leader is a team builder and is deeply committed to the process of shared decision-making in all aspects of site management. This leader functions as an advocate who cuts through the layered bureaucracy and effectively advertises the accomplishments of the school. As the site's fiscal and operational duties are handled by the

SHARED DECISION-MAKING

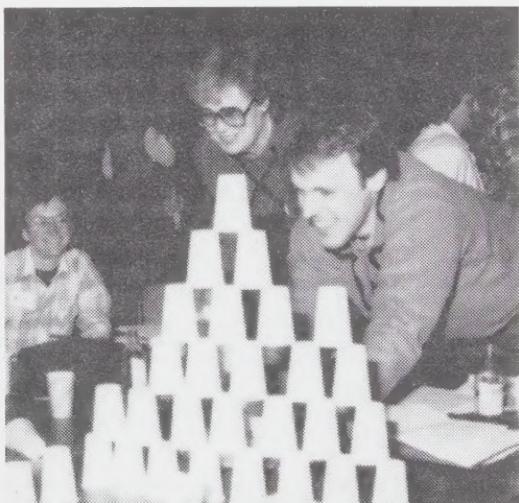
Shared decision-making is decision-making based on a consensus incorporating all the affected members of the school community.

operations manager, the site leader's primary focus is on the implementation of the site's educational objectives. The site leader is chosen through a consensus decision-making process involving all site personnel and the parent outreach group.

As a facilitator of teaching and learning, the site leader is knowledgeable of curricula, capable of implementing site programs, and expert in classroom instruction. The site leader is a creative, energetic, and intelligent person who loves children and has established a good working relationship with all site personnel. This person is a consensus-builder, dedicated to working closely with families, students, faculty, support staff and the outside community to pursue educational excellence.

THE SUPPORT STAFF

We envision all people who work at a school site, or are involved in any activity related to the school educational program, as support staff. They reflect the ethnic diversity of the student population and include not only paraprofessionals who work directly with teachers and students in the classroom, but also staff involved in building and maintenance, cafeteria operations, transportation, security, and administration, as well as those who offer outside support services from the district and the community. This staff supports, supplements and complements the teacher's instructional efforts, and is an integral part of the educational process.



THE FAMILY

In our vision, schools assist in families' roles as the prime teachers and nurturers by forming a partnership through outreach and support groups. Schools define families inclusively, as diverse and fluid units which may include single parents, gay and lesbian families, foster, grand or godparents, group homes, or other configurations of supportive living. Schools actively encourage the participation of all people who can positively influence a child's education.

Outreach and support groups offer families enrichment opportunities, technical arts training, parenting skills classes, access to health and social services, and classroom volunteer training, all designed to promote family members as lifelong learners. All activities are accessible to non-English speaking family members and acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of San Francisco families. These activities are also flexible in scope and location so that they meet the needs of the school community.

Family members' participation in schools enables them to have a direct influence on curriculum, school climate, student attitudes and classroom activities. Their work as on-site volunteers provides students with positive role models in classrooms and other school settings. They receive compensation for active participation in these activities with services, goods, or monetary incentives from all groups benefitting from an educated populace, and free transportation to and from schools facilitates their participation. In addition, community leaders and businesses recognize the value of family involvement and provide release time for their employees to participate in the schools.

ASSESSMENT

In our vision, the goal of all assessment is to guide and maximize the growth and success of every learner. Assessment is a prescriptive tool that enables learners to reach their potential. Social, cultural, physical, and academic strengths are considered as the learner, peers, family and teachers evaluate growth.

The assessment process recognizes differing rates of growth and achievement, with peer and self evaluation at the core of this process. Learners define, develop, and value their abilities, talents, culture, and language. Time is always taken to reflect on learning and growth so learners assume responsibility for their education.

The evaluative process encourages unique solutions in all areas: the arts, life-training and academics, as well as social and physical development. Assessment also fosters creativity and recognizes and values effort. Evaluative tools reflect and value diversity. Specialists from various ethnic groups develop the assessment tools which reflect the literature, values and themes of all represented groups.

The learners' and the teachers' success expands beyond standardized test results. Portfolios and activity projects reflect growth and sequential knowledge acquisition as well as skills in problem-solving,

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Portfolio assessment is an assessment based on a collection of student materials including projects, video tapes, computer materials and rough drafts which chronicle a student's learning process.

critical thinking and communication. Assessment is built into the learning environment rather than imposed upon it. In addition, instead of post-

secondary institutions determining what students need to continue their education, high schools themselves certify students for completion, and all schools, preschool to college, work in partnership to determine students' progressive educational benchmarks. Schools are responsible for all students' achievement and are evaluated on their ability to meet the diverse needs of all of their students.

Finally, teachers are accountable for providing a learning environment that addresses learners' and society's needs, while allowing students to perform to their maximum potential. Therefore, the learners, their families and the teacher's peers should be the primary assessors of effective teaching.

THE LARGER COMMUNITY

In our vision, business, the larger community, and the school community work toward shared goals and the means to achieve those goals, both in the schools and in the larger community. Central to those goals are the continual definition and preservation of democratic and humanistic values, respect for cultural diversity, and promotion of academic achievement. The larger community and business understand that the success or failure of our schools is inseparably intertwined with the success of business, the larger community and society as a whole, and therefore share in the risk-taking necessary for successful education in a rapidly changing world.

Our vision calls for the larger community and business to spend time in schools to ensure their understanding of current school conditions, and to recognize teachers as professionals in education. Schools benefit from this community presence by valuing and integrating the ideas and participation of business and the larger community. Students study and participate in the community, in institutions such as arts and culture, government, social services and business.

The rewards for this partnership of schools, business and community are student citizens who readily and effectively participate in, and adapt to, our changing world and work place.

TEACHER EDUCATION

We see the field of teacher education as no longer the exclusive province of the university. Instead it is the responsibility of the entire educational community. Educational practitioners at all levels participate in teacher training, certification, mentoring, research and collaboration.

High standards for admission to teacher training programs are instituted to provide for the selection of the finest minds from all areas of

society for entrance into the profession. Certification is given by a teacher-administered board which considers business and other life experiences as well as academic training and demonstrated practical competence. Graduate study includes a paid internship, and each newly certified teacher serves a term of apprenticeship in close collaboration with a mentor teacher. Both mentor and apprentice are given reduced teaching loads.

Interaction between the different levels of the educational community from pre-school to university results in increased opportunities for professional improvement and greater communication between teachers from diverse areas of expertise. Young people of diverse backgrounds have opportunities for career exploration in educational fields beginning in elementary schools. They are able to interact with practitioners on all levels.

The teaching profession attracts superior people who choose it for its excellent working conditions, public respect, high pay, intellectual stimulation and opportunity to serve humanity.



CREATING A VISION INSTITUTE

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THE EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Education is a basic human right and shall be free, public, equitable, life-long, fully funded, individually and locally determined, reflecting the diverse needs of the American population. Government shall consider the funding of free public education as its highest priority and responsibility, in order to insure the well-being of our greatest resources: our children, our women, and our men.



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